



**FOR THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT
February 18, 2016**

RE: RB 81

***AN ACT CONCERNING THE DESIGNATION OF CERTAIN AREAS OF THE
HOUSATONIC RIVER AS A WILD AND SCENIC RIVER***

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

To: Sen. Ted Kennedy Jr. and Rep. James Albis, Chairmen; and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee:

Rivers Alliance enthusiastically supports RB 81. The stretch of the Housatonic River proposed for Wild and Scenic River designation is extremely beautiful, in an area loved by local residents and visited by people from around the country and the world. Preservation of its environment, ecology, scenic values, and recreational opportunities would all be furthered by this designation.

The importance of the Housatonic River and its tributary, the Shepaug River, were recognized in the 1970s when the original studies were done for Wild and Scenic designation. Back then, progress slowed due to fear of federal government interference with local land-use decisions. Today, the law is clear that the designation does not interfere with local authorities, and experience with Wild and Scenic designations on Connecticut's Farmington River and Eightmile River confirms that elevating the importance of high-quality waterways benefits the surrounding communities. These rivers are tourist destinations and important to the local and regional economies.

One benefit that might not be immediately obvious is that the process of designation and oversight brings together communities to discuss and work toward mutual goals. It can be a form of entirely voluntary regional land-use planning, a very good thing.

Thank you for raising this bill. We look forward to attending a signing.

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